



## KEY FINDINGS

## Communicating Diversity Initiatives

*"The message [about diversity] must infiltrate every nook and cranny of the workplace, from the top on down. ...Top executives must send the message that diversity is a business issue. 'If nobody at the top talks about it, it's not considered important.'"*

Source: Gillian Flynn, "Do You Have the Right Approach to Diversity?" *Workforce*.

### Senior Management Support Checklist

- ☐ Does management create and communicate a diversity vision for the organization?
- ☐ Does management identify measurable long-term objectives which exemplify that vision?
- ☐ Does management hold everyone accountable for what they are expected to do with regards to achieving success with diversity?
- ☐ Does management lead by personal example?
- ☐ Does management sustain enough organizational awareness to integrate desired behaviors into the culture?
- ☐ Does management establish diversity as a competitive advantage and a business issue that is not in conflict with other business priorities?

Source: Corporate Leadership Council, *Diversity in a European Context*, Washington: Corporate Executive Board (May 2000).

### COMMUNICATING DIVERSITY INITIATIVES THROUGHOUT THE ORGANIZATION

- Thorough communication of diversity policies and goals is of critical importance when launching a diversity initiative, particularly to make diversity an all-encompassing workplace attitude. Companies should first communicate to management and supervisory staff to educate them regarding program goals and explain their role in program success. The Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) explains that communication to all levels of employees may take the following forms:<sup>1,2</sup>

- Diversity training sessions
- Staff meetings
- Special memos and handouts
- Policy manuals
- Articles in employee publications (e.g., newsletters)
- Question-and-answer booklets

Additionally, companies should communicate their commitment to diversity externally by including statements on recruiting materials and on the corporate Web site.

- Past Council research highlights the importance of communicating the business case for diversity up and down the organizational structure to translate an intangible commitment to diversity into behaviors that have an impact on the business. Council-profiled companies utilize the following tools to support both upward and downward communication of diversity initiatives:<sup>3</sup>

- **Upward communication**—Driving the diversity message up to gain commitment from the senior executive team:
  - **Checklist**—Utilize a checklist, such as the one at left, to identify areas where there is a lack of senior management support.
  - **Findings Report**—Evaluate the business impact of the diversity initiative and email the findings in report form to the senior management team.
- **Downward communication**—Driving the diversity message down to communicate the importance of diversity to all employees:
  - **Mission Statement**—Develop a diversity mission statement.
  - **Diversity as an Objective**—Include diversity in managerial objectives in the appraisal process.
  - **Training**—Utilize a range of developmental tools and training to raise diversity awareness, including optional or compulsory management training and HR staff training.

- The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) explains that the following are essential aspects of effective initial communication about diversity:<sup>4</sup>

- **Explain the Business Case**—Explain the relevance of diversity to the organization, emphasizing its impact on the bottom line, productivity and achievement of company goals.
- **Build on Existing Values and Vision**—Values around ethics, responsibility and empowerment may naturally be linked to diversity.
- **Show Employees What's In It for Them**—In addition to explaining how diversity benefits the organization, it is important to help staff understand how diversity benefits them individually. Emphasizing more effective teams, less conflict and greater understanding of customers are several examples.
- **Spell Out an Inclusive Definition of Diversity**—Emphasize that race is more than race or gender and encompasses multiple dimensions of similarity and difference. Without an inclusive element, many employees are likely to reject the process without seeing themselves as part of a diverse mix.
- **Explain the Process**—Explain to employees the concrete steps in the organization's focus on diversity, including individual responsibilities and available opportunities and events.
- **Demonstrate Commitment**—Place a credible, powerful leader at the helm of the process or commit executive team members to serve on diversity task forces, for example, to demonstrate the organization's strong commitment to diversity.

### Tips on Communicating with Diversity in Mind

#### In communication efforts...

- ❑ Remember that diversity has many levels and complexities, including cultures within cultures
- ❑ Do not separate or single out particular populations or groups
- ❑ Admit what is not known about other cultures or lifestyles
- ❑ Notice what people call themselves to be sensitive to personal preferences
- ❑ Do not make assumptions based on a person's appearance, name or group
- ❑ Do not patronize; for example, avoid phrases like "You understand the importance of..."
- ❑ Do not doubt the authenticity of what employees share about feelings and experiences
- ❑ Be willing to change biases
- ❑ When writing, replace judgments with facts
- ❑ Use parallel titles and terms; for example, referring to men and women in similar manners with both first and last names
- ❑ Do not use judgmental words; for example, "sexual orientation" is less judgmental and more accurate than "sexual preference"
- ❑ Have a second party with a different perspective review planned communication memos, letters, speeches

Source: Author Unknown, "14 Tips on Communicating with Diversity in Mind," *Workforce* (date unknown).

### DRAFT A DIVERSITY MISSION STATEMENT

- Ensuring that all employees understand the policies and goals of the company's diversity initiative is key to successful operation of a diversity program. When a corporation creates a strategy that establishes diversity as one of its core corporate values, typically its first step is to write and publish a mission statement. Issuing this statement from key executives and leaders further underscores diversity's importance to the organization.

- **Gannett Company's** chairman issues an annual statement to all employees of the organization's commitment to diversity; senior executives report Gannett's progress in diversity to the corporate board each year and results are published in company newsletters and annual reports that are given out to all employees.<sup>5</sup>
- In annual letters to more than 100,000 employees, **Procter and Gamble's** former chairman, Edwin Artz, outlined the company's diversity policy with this statement:<sup>6</sup>

*"Developing and managing a strong, diverse organization is essential to achieving our business purpose and objectives."*

- The CEO of **IBM**, Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., announced the company's diversity policy in a letter to all employees.<sup>7</sup>

*"I believe workforce diversity to be of real importance to IBM's success. As the marketplace becomes increasingly diverse, IBM's competitiveness will be enhanced through a workforce which reflects the growing diversity of the external labor force, and the growing diversity of our customers."*

- A sample diversity policy from the Bureau of National Affairs is outlined below:<sup>8</sup>

*"It is the policy of [Company Name] that there will be no discrimination with regard to race, religion, color, age, sex, national origin, or physical disability in all matters applying to all employees and applicants for employment of the Company. Such matters include compensation, training or other privileges of employment...."*

- When drafting a diversity mission or vision statement, organizations should understand that "diversity" can be defined beyond the narrow boundaries of race, gender or age. Diversity may also encompass the following areas:

- Sexual orientation
- Economic status
- Geographic origin
- Personal values
- Education
- Job functions

Each organization should define diversity by terms that are meaningful to its workforce and serve to unite, not polarize, the employee population.<sup>9</sup>

### INCLUDE EMPLOYEES IN DIVERSITY ACTIVITIES

- **Garner Employee Input**—Many companies involve all of the employees in establishing and discussing diversity initiatives by asking for their input:<sup>10,11,12</sup>
- **Bank of America** jump-started a strenuous effort to push diversity throughout the organization through its corporate diversity task forces, initiated by the CEO. Twenty-eight executives from various locations were charged with gathering employee feedback, reviewing current programs and suggesting new ways of promoting diversity. The company also relies on diversity business councils and diversity network chapters to encourage communication among and between employees on diversity-related topics.

#### INCLUDE EMPLOYEES IN DIVERSITY ACTIVITIES, CONTINUED

- **Corning Glass** involves all employees in its diversity initiative through focus groups, surveys and quality improvement teams addressing diversity issues. Corrective action groups problem solve the issues emerging from quality improvement teams, which are made up of all levels of employees.
- **Allstate Insurance Corporation** monitors its progress toward workplace diversity via its "Diversity Index." The index is an online employee feedback system that measures employee perceptions.
- **Encourage Discussion Among Affinity Groups**—Employee networking of affinity groups assist organizations' communication efforts by encouraging discussion and information sharing among employees. **Fannie Mae**, an organization renowned for its diversity programs, maintains 14 Employee Networking Groups for such populations as African-Americans, Native Americans, Catholics, older workers and gays and lesbians. The groups serve as social and networking hubs while also fostering workplace communication about diversity issues among employees at all levels.<sup>13</sup>
- **Celebrate and Honor Diversity with Employees**—Companies may designate a particular day, week or month to celebrating and honoring diversity in an effort to bring greater attention to diversity initiatives.<sup>14,15</sup>
  - Each year, **Chrysler Corporation** celebrates "National Diversity Week" to celebrate and honor the unique talents of its workforce. The company established the week of celebration to applaud the strength of the company's plurality and to encourage further understanding and appreciation of the talents, educational backgrounds and life experiences of those in the company's workforce.
  - Firms profiled in past Council research hold annual week- or month-long diversity programs that include a variety of activities designed to advance cultural awareness. Individual business units may design a unique schedule of activities and events consistent with broader corporate guidelines.

#### OFFER TRAINING ON DIVERSITY-FOCUSED TOPICS

- **Bausch & Lomb, Incorporated** includes diversity as a topic in its orientation program. Through an interactive online video and guidelines' issued by HR, new hires receive information on the company's core values, which include communication, creativity, learning and diversity. By promoting these values during the orientation process, Bausch & Lomb hopes to instill them into employees' daily work life, thereby fostering the desired culture throughout the organization.<sup>16</sup>
- Research indicates that diversity training should begin with an explanation of diversity and its importance to the company, followed by skills training that provides information needed to manage and work within a diverse workforce. Finally, companies should help employees apply newly acquired skills to improve the work environment and affect the bottom-line. The components of successful diversity training programs are presented below:<sup>17,18</sup>
  - Accountability for long-term effectiveness
  - Combination with other diversity initiatives
  - Commitment and support from top management
  - Comprehensive training
  - Evaluations
  - Inclusion as part of the organizational strategic plan
  - Inclusive programs
  - Mandatory attendance
  - Programs that meet the specific needs of the organization
  - Qualified and respectful trainers

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*"Effective diversity training has three common elements:*

- *All employees are required to participate.*
- *Training sessions do not separate top executives from lower- and middle-level workers. The presence and participation of top executives is important and signals commitment.*
- *Minorities and women are not isolated for special training."*

Source: *Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital*,  
The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission:  
Washington (March 1995).

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OFFER TRAINING ON DIVERSITY-FOCUSED TOPICS, CONTINUED

- Diversity training should serve to unite employees from all backgrounds, rather than targeting or blaming certain groups for the position of other groups. *Workforce* magazine recommends the following tactics to ensure all groups, and in particular white males, feel included and see the value in diversity training:<sup>19</sup>
  - Ensure trainers recognize the importance of creating an inclusive, welcoming environment for all employees.
  - Utilize trainers from a range of backgrounds, not just women or minorities.
  - Recognize diversity of experiences across age groups and backgrounds, including within the white male population; for example, a 60-year-old white male executive has different experiences and views than a 20-year-old white male plant worker with a high school degree.
  - Offer a forum for white males to discuss ongoing challenges and issues and take these issues seriously.
  - Include all groups in training and development opportunities, such as mentoring or special interest groups.

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of National Affairs, Incorporated [CD-ROM], "Diversity Policies and Practices."

Available: The Bureau of National Affairs [30 August 2002].

<sup>2</sup> Gillian Flynn, "Do You Have the Right Approach to Diversity?" *Workforce* (October 1995).

(Obtained through [www.workforce.com](http://www.workforce.com)) [30 August 2002].

<sup>3</sup> Corporate Leadership Council, *Diversity in a European Context*, Washington: Corporate Executive Board (May 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Society for Human Resource Management, *Launching an Initiative*, [www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org) [30 August 2002].

<sup>5</sup> Gillian Flynn, "Do You Have the Right Approach to Diversity?"

<sup>6</sup> Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital, The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission: Washington (March 1995).

([http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/library/e\\_archive/gov\\_reports/GlassCeiling/documents/GlassCeilingEnvironmentalScan.pdf](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/library/e_archive/gov_reports/GlassCeiling/documents/GlassCeilingEnvironmentalScan.pdf))

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> Bureau of National Affairs, Incorporated [CD-ROM], "Diversity Policies and Practices."

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>10</sup> Matt F. Dobbs, "Managing Diversity: Lessons from the Private Sector," *Public Personnel Management* (September 1996). (Obtained through Factiva).

<sup>11</sup> Shari Caudron, "Diversity Watch: Two Companies' Diversity Efforts Are Screened and Evaluated By the Experts," *Black Enterprise*. (1 February 1998). (Obtained through Factiva).

<sup>12</sup> Gillian Flynn, "Do You Have the Right Approach to Diversity?"

<sup>13</sup> Richard Koonce, "Redefining Diversity: It's Not Just the Right Thing to Do. It Also Makes Good Business Sense," *Training & Development* (December 2001). (Obtained through Factiva).

<sup>14</sup> Author Unknown, "Chrysler Group Celebrates Diversity Week," *PR Newswire* (12 October 2001). (Obtained through Factiva).

<sup>15</sup> Corporate Leadership Council, *Diversity Training at Firms in the UK*, London: Corporate Executive Board (September 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Hutchins, "Getting to Know You," *Workforce* (November 2000). (Obtained through Factiva).

<sup>17</sup> Rose Mary Wentling and Nilda Palma-Rivas, "Current Status and Future Trends of Diversity Initiatives in the Workplace: Diversity Experts' Perspectives," *Human Resource Development Quarterly* (1 October 1998). (Obtained through Factiva)

<sup>18</sup> Sara Rynes and Benson Rosen, "What Makes Diversity Programs Work?" *HR Magazine* (October 1994). (Obtained through Factiva).

<sup>19</sup> Gillian Flynn, "White Males See Diversity's Other Side," *Workforce* (February 1999). (Obtained through [www.workforce.com](http://www.workforce.com)) [30 August 2002].